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Current Opinion

Development of the Conception of Christ in the Gospels

Rev. W. C. Allen, of Oxford University, author of the new *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, shows how the apostolic conception of Jesus grew during the apostolic age, as evidenced by the advanced view of Christ which the Gospel of Matthew presents as compared with the Gospel of Mark. He says: It is evident that contemplation of the life of the Lord, and reflection upon his person and work, and all that it meant for human life; and the deepening reverence that springs spontaneously from the life of meditation upon his words and from spiritual communion with him, and from worship of God in his name, were gradually leading Christian writers, partly to refine and purify, partly to make careful choice, of the language in which they described his life. In connection with his Sacred Person the choicest words only must be used—choicest not for splendor or beauty of sound or of suggestion, but as conveying in the simplest and most direct way the greatest amount of truth about him with the least admixture of wrong emphasis. In this respect the Synoptic Gospels present in miniature the same process that afterward took place on a larger scale in the history of the creeds. Already the gospel-writers found themselves committed to the task of describing the life of One whom they knew to have been a truly human person, whom yet they believed to have been an incarnation of the Eternal.

The Use of the Logia in the Gospel of Matthew

In addition, Mr. Allen confirms the commonly accepted hypothesis that our first gospel is based chiefly upon the Gospel of Mark and the Matthaean Logia. The Gospel of Mark has been taken up almost wholly into the first gospel, with little rearrangement, but with a large amount of minute modification. The Matthaean Logia was also taken up quite fully and arranged in connection with the Mark material. So that our first gospel as regards its narrative material is chiefly taken from the Gospel of Mark, and as regards its discourse material is chiefly taken from the Logia. The Matthaean Logia, Mr. Allen says, was a collection of Christ's teachings containing isolated sayings, sayings grouped into discourses, and parables. If there was any particular arrangement or order observed, it is of course not possible now to rediscover it. One of the longer discourses was probably the Sermon on the Mount; but as this now stands in the first gospel

it has been enlarged by the editor, who has inserted sayings from other parts of the Logia. There were also in all probability in the Logia a group of eschatological sayings, and groups of parables. The view is preferred that the Logia was written in Aramaic; however, the editor of the first gospel did not himself translate this Aramaic into Greek, but used a Greek translation of it. He thinks Luke also used the Logia, but that he worked from a different Greek form of it.

New Knowledge upon the New Testament from the Papyri

Professor Adolf Deissmann, of the University of Heidelberg, who is making such helpful contributions to New Testament study by gathering the evidence from the recently recovered inscriptions and papyri of New Testament times, says this new light has a threefold direct value: (1) It has taught us to judge rightly of the language of the New Testament, which is written in the non-literary speech of the people; (2) It has heightened our appreciation of these non-literary writings by teaching us to distinguish between popular and artistic varieties of literary work; (3) It has taught us to reconstruct with fairness and greater accuracy the popular religious environment in which the great religious transformation produced by Christianity took place. We now see primitive Christianity, not with dogmatic theological eyes, but with sympathy for simple religion, especially for the vigorous religion of the masses. We now recognize that the character of Jesus is wholly, and that that of Paul is practically, untheological and predogmatic, the primitive Christianity having a lofty simplicity.

The Advance in New Testament Lexicography

In the same article, in the *Expository Times* for April, Professor Deissmann speaks strongly of the need of a new lexicon of New Testament Greek. Without failing to recognize the valuable work that has been done in this line since Pasor published the first special lexicon of the New Testament in 1619 down to the latest lexicon, by Thayer in 1887, he shows how the recently recovered material and the advance of philological science make it necessary for us to go once more completely over the ground of New Testament lexicography and produce an entirely new lexicon. It is to be recognized that every word has its history, and that this history must be searched out from the earliest time in which we can trace it, through the various stages of its use, until it finds a place in the New Testament. No work can be too careful or too exhaustive when the object is to re-create the background to any saying of Jesus or Paul or John whereby we may determine how men of the first Christian century understood and were bound to understand them.

Theological Tendencies

Recent numbers of the *Homiletic Review* have a symposium on "Present-Day Theology," in which Professors James Orr, H. C. Sheldon, W. N. Clarke, W. F. Adeney, and others set forth what seem to them to be the essentials of present-day theology as a system of faith in the church. There is not much satisfaction in this symposium for Dr. Campbell. Perhaps this is as it should be. The position taken by Dr. Campbell in his recent volume, *New Theology*, is not that of the church at large, and is not even that of the progressive wing of the church. It is always unsafe to generalize from one's own individual position to that of the church, or even a school in the church. Conservatives are as much to be reckoned with as radicals. The discussion just now on in England is not likely to be duplicated in America. In this country theology is moving along a different line, and is more in the hands of really systematic and unrhetoical thinkers. The theology of the preacher and that of the teacher of theology are not always the same, but in the long run it will be the preacher that will give the set to theological opinion. The symposium indicates that theology in America is proceeding more cautiously, and with larger respect for the findings of the past, than in Great Britain. Even the American radical is more under the influence of Ritschl than that of the neo-Hegelians.

Ordination Tests and Christian Union

Sir Oliver Lodge, who is just now doing yeoman service in making religion scientific and science religious, has an important article in the *Hibbert Journal* for April on the reform of the church. He thinks that the great changes needed in the church are larger spontaneity in church worship, more liberal education for ministers, the pruning or simplification of tests, the development of true beneficence, and a stalwart opposition to all abuse of power.

The test which he proposes for ordination would be:

Here solemnly, in the face of this congregation, I declare before Almighty God, to whose Holy Will I entirely submit myself, that I long for Christ's ideal of the kingdom of heaven upon earth; and, God helping me, I will with all my power and ability strive to this end and to no other, with such wisdom as it may please the Holy Spirit to confer upon me; for whose guidance I will always pray to the Father, in the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The test, it will be noticed, contains no doctrinal element beyond the kingdom of God and the implied reference to the Trinity. The last clause, "the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ," however, opens the door to a good deal of theology, if desired. Evidently it is Sir Oliver's idea that the

church shall stand for the elemental rather than the derived truths of religion.

Theoretically, such simplification is highly desirable; practically, the question is bound to arise whether its proposal is anything more than academic idealism. It would be difficult, as men are now constituted, for any church to develop much enthusiasm for itself on the elementals of religion. Whether we like it or not, as a matter of fact, the thing which arouses the largest enthusiasm for church organization is not the fundamental truths of Christianity, but the doctrinal position of some body of Christians. In other words, ecclesiastical enthusiasm is not born of elemental religious principles, but of peculiar tenets. It is to be hoped that such a situation is changing; but we have not yet reached the stage where it is passed. One of the largest duties which lie before the Christian ministry today is the education of interest in religion itself, and the transformation of denominational enthusiasm into religious enthusiasm.